NOTES AND COMMENTS

Some Problems in the History of The Reformation

It was in one of Father Philip Hughes's earliest works—if not indeed the first printed work of the many with which he has enriched the history of the Church—that he pointed out the central importance of the Catholic question in the history of England from the Reformation to the present day. This was a thesis which must have sounded strangely to the majority of Englishmen, for whom the Catholic issue must still appear not substantially more important than it was before the great Catholic revival which began in the last century.

It is particularly noteworthy how the history of the sixteenth century crisis in England came to be written with such little emphasis on this vital and central question. Historians of Tudor England were in general so preoccupied with the beginnings of their nation's glories in Tudor times, and so conditioned by the long-established claims of the Church of England, that they could almost come to forget how real and how important the religious conflict was in the sixteenth century. There were exceptions, it is true. There was John Lingard, a truly great historian, but it was extraordinary how many contrived to borrow their facts from Lingard while ignoring the argument he had used these facts to support. There was Hilaire Belloc: but with him temperament and the circumstances in which he wrote combined to force him into certain exaggerations, at least in his manner of presentation, which tended to obscure the true value of his work. The sixteenth century came to be accepted as evolution, not revolution. Royal supremacy succeeded papal supremacy, but the Church of England remained. It was felt to be a particularly English way of doing things. And in England there were so many tangible things which seemed to suggest continuity between the middle ages and modern times that it was all too easy to conclude that this continuity was substantial, not accidental. The Catholic question was ignored.

Philip Hughes has done as much as any man to recall it, particularly in his great study of the Reformation in England, the third and concluding volume of which has now appeared.[1] In this third volume he carries the story down to the death of Elizabeth I, and the conferences at Hampton Court with which James I began his reign. The accession of James is indeed a turning point in the story of England's defection from the faith: the seventeenth century sees problems very different from those of the sixteenth. The Catholic Church has now given up hope of a complete reversal of fortune. After the long reign

[1] *The Reformation in England*, vol. III. London, Hollis and Carter, 1954.

of Elizabeth there is no hope of full restoration. The most that can now be hoped for is toleration in a non-Catholic England. The Established Church faces different problems also. The struggle with Catholicism has been won, but there remains the struggle with sectaries within the Church of England itself. The latter is to be the problem preoccupying the Stuarts as the former had preoccupied the Tudors.

There is no need at this stage to speak of the value of Father Hughes's work on the English Reformation, when we have been watching so eagerly for the appearance of each successive volume. It may, however, be worth calling attention to the strength and cohesion given to his work in consequence of his keeping central the Catholic question. This strength and cohesion arises, not from any careful manipulation of the evidence—few historians are so obviously anxious as Father Hughes to look steadily at the full truth—but because this question is in fact central, is the key to English history during the reign of Elizabeth.

The decision to alter religion, taken in 1559, was, he reminds us, the decisive element in the new reign. It was a decision by no means altogether prompted by religious motives, and the resulting settlement of religion was in many ways a curious amalgam. He then examines how this was presented to the English nation—for, as he points out, the 1559 settlement was not the fruit of any universal conviction: the party in power had to set itself consciously to the task of "altering the religious outlook of the nation." The means by which this was attempted are then described, together with the difficulties encountered. It did not, he notes, bring about any great religious revival. It proved impossible to provide a ministry which should preach the settlement of 1559 so as to set all afire: indeed, as well as the insufficiency of the ministry, the settlement itself was not such as to provoke a great renewal of religious fervour. The Catholics were by no means the only Englishmen dissatisfied with it. There was a large body for whom it did not go nearly far enough, among whom was a force of personal conviction strong enough to carry them to victory in the middle of the next century.

Long before this they had their effect on the Established Church itself. Father Hughes's comparison of the theory of the Church propounded by Hooker, writing towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, with that propounded by Jewel, writing at its beginning, is a brilliant piece of work which bears eloquent witness to the influence of the extremists within the Established Church in making it retreat even from the "moderate Protestantism" of the 1559 settlement, and underlines the inherent weakness of the *Ecclesia Anglicana* since the time Henry VIII repudiated authority and declared himself its head.

Meanwhile, the steady pressure of the whole legal system was being turned against the Catholics. It was persecution—there is no other word for it. This is another matter in which the generally received account needs critical handling. It has been usual to stress the clemency of Elizabeth towards recusants in the opening years of her reign, and to say that active persecution began only with the papal declaration of war with the *Regnans in excelsis* of 1570. But, as Father Hughes points out, the practice of Catholic life was impossible under the "liberal"

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régime of Elizabeth. The pressure of her penal laws was effective from the very start, and the proof of this is afforded by the "all but universal" surrender of the Catholics before 1570. At the best they were drifting dangerously, until they were shocked into a realization of what was at stake.

What shocked them into this realization was not St. Pius V's excommunication of Elizabeth. The *Regnans in excelsis* is important, as Father Hughes shows, for what it was made to mean rather than for what it was meant to mean. The decisive factor, the turning point, was the appearance in England of the priest trained in the spirit and methods of the Counter-reformation. The first of these priests—and the bulk of them always—came from Allen's foundation of Douai. Before long, the religious had come to their aid, notably the Jesuits, two of whom had become a living legend during their short mission in England, and one of these two—Edmund Campion—an undying legend in his barbarous and glorious death.

He was not alone in his dying, for the government was quick to recognize the challenge of the "seminary priests and Jesuits," and the young missionaries from Douai landed in England in the full knowledge that they had every reason to look forward to sharing Campion's fate, and that the best they could hope for in this world was a life of privation and anxiety. Of those who died, the government did its utmost to proclaim that they died as traitors. Their propaganda met notable success, but the real evidence is against them. These priests were executed for their religion, for being priests. There is no need to elaborate their story, for their souls are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. They stand out from the whole sad business of the state-imposed religion, and the even sadder business of Catholic men surrendering their principles in the face of unendurable pressures—"their plain 'yea' and 'nay' coming through the horrible atmosphere of the state's arrangement with a truly bracing sweetness."[1]

Not all the Counter-reformation efforts have the same heroic simplicity. In particular, there is the question of the plots to depose, even to murder, Elizabeth, and the complicity of English ecclesiastics in certain aspects of these. There is no use even attempting a summary judgment. The story must be read in detail, so many factors have to be taken into consideration. I have always been particularly struck by the position of Allen, director of the missionary effort and also involved in the political tangle. It seems clear that Father Hughes has been reflecting on this problem also, and he now seems inclined to minimize Allen's initiative in the political effort: that in so far as he was involved, it was in obedience to superior commands.[2] It is beyond question that he kept his activities distinct. Talk of politics was not encouraged at Douai. The students there were being prepared for one purpose only. Still, we cannot avoid reflecting on the agonizing decisions which must have been Allen's as he sent his young priests to England, while at the same time his other activities were making it easier for the English government to prepare

[1] Ibid., p. 285.

[2] Cf. his earlier work, *Rome and the Counter-reformation in England*, (Burns Oates, 1942), pp. 193 ff., with *The Reformation in England*, vol. III, p. 316.

a case to send them to Tyburn as traitors. It is most unfortunate that we still lack a formal biography of that really great man, William Allen of the Lancashire Fylde, cardinal of San Martino ai Monti.

II

This last consideration seems to bring naturally to mind the much more serious lacunae in the sources and literature of the history of the Reformation in Ireland. Irish historians will turn to Philip Hughes's work with envy and gratitude. With gratitude, because it clarifies our notions of the English Reformation, and is thereby a great if indirect help in our efforts to understand the course of the attempt to introduce the English Reformation into Ireland, which was, in fact, what the Irish Reformation was. With envy, when we look on the wealth of sources and studies on which he can draw, compared with our own meagre equipment. True, he has to think his way round obstacles arising from a long-established anti-Catholic tradition, which has coloured so much of what has been written on the Reformation in England. Here there is no corresponding tradition, but rather the reverse: "in Ireland there are many Churches; there is but one Irish Church"[1] and it is the Catholic Church. This, however, has its own dangers. England has developed her own legend, and we are not immune from having developed ours. The danger is all the greater in our case in so far as the control we can exercise from historical sources is less. For these sources are very slight in comparison with the English ones. There is still a fairly substantial body of State Papers, available in one form or another. Apart from these, sources are scattered and fragmentary enough, particularly with regard to the basic, Gaelic factor in the life of the nation. It is beyond question that this must be seen in a particularly distorted way from the evidence provided by the State Papers: but how are we to correct this distortion?

To take some questions, more or less at random. The first concerns the religious state of the people when the Reformation was introduced; the second arises from one aspect of their resistance to that Reformation. First, what do we really know of the state of religion in Ireland when the Reformation came?[2] The usual estimates seem to be based on a few well-known sources. Time and again one meets the verdict given in the "State of Ireland and Plan for its Reformation," written in 1515:[3]

> Some sayeth, that the prelates of the Churche, and clergye, is muche cause of all the mysse order of the land; for ther is no archebysshop, ne bysshop, abbot, ne pryor, parson, ne vycar, ne any other person of the Churche, highe or lowe, greate or smalle, Englyshe or Iryshe, that useyth to preache the worde of Godde, saveing the poore fryers beggars; and ther wodde of Godde do cesse, ther canne be no grace, and wythoute the specyall [*grace*]

[1] The phrase comes from P. S. O'Hegarty, *A history of Ireland under the Union*, p. 399.

[2] See the sources available to Father Hughes in his study of this aspect of the Reformation in England, *The Reformation in England*, vol. I, pp. 31-106.

[3] *State Papers, Henry VIII*, vol. II, pp. 1-31. The passage cited is on pp. 15-16.

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of Godde, this lande maye never be reformyd ; and by preacheing and techeing of prelates of the Churche, and by prayer and oryson of the devoute persons of the same, Godde useyth alwaye to graunte his aboundaunte grace ; ergo, the Churche, not useing the premysseis, is muche cause of all the said mysse ordre of this lande.

Also, the Churche of thys lande use not to lerne any other scyence, but the Lawe of Canon, for covetyce of lucre traunsytory ; all other scyence, whereof grow none such lucre, the persons of the churche dothe despyce. They cowde more by the ploughe rustycall, then by lucre of the ploughe celestyall, to which they hathe streccheyd ther handes, and loke alwayes backwarde. They tende muche more to lucre of that ploughe, wherof groweth sclaunder and rebuke, then to lucre of the soules, that is the ploughe of Cryste. And to the traunsytorye lucre of that rustycall ploughe they tendre so muche, that lytill or nought ther chargeyth to lucre to Cryste, the soules of ther subgetes, of whom they bere the cure, by preacheing and teacheing of the worde of Godde, and by ther good insample gyveing ; whiche is the ploughe of worsshipp, and of honour, and the ploughe of grace of that ever shalle indure.

This document, it is true, is " suffused with candour, sympathy, understanding, and earnest religious fervour," but it is true also that " the writer is evidently an Englishman,"[1] which gives rise to a query very pertinent in view of the fact that the country at the time was almost altogether Irish-speaking : " Did he know what he was talking about ? "

Beyond doubt, his strictures on the clergy, at least on the higher clergy, would seem to be confirmed by the evidence of the Papal Letters, the Annates, and similar records of ecclesiastcal administration for the period immediately preceding the Reformation. The evidence here is such as to make far from incredible such stories as that of Thomas Brady and Cormac MacGovern, each of whom had got himself provided to the see of Kilmore, and each of whom had succeeded in receiving episcopal consecration. Neither being able to dislodge the other, it seems they reached a gentlemen's agreement to share the revenues of the See, and at provincial synods were officially described as " Thomas and Cormac, by the grace of God, bishops of Kilmore."[2]

It is clear that church administration in Ireland was not immune from many of the evils which afflicted the Church in general in the fifteenth century, but, even more than was the case in England, that cannot have been the whole story. It we ask some of the questions which Father Hughes asks concerning England, we find ourselves very much at a loss for answers. What was the piety of the lay-folk ? What do we know of popular religious practices ? Were sermons preached often, and what kinds of sermons were they ? Did the ordinary parish-priest preach with any regularity, and how was he equipped to do so ?

[1] Jourdan, " The Breach with Rome,"in W. A. Phillips (ed.) *History of the Church of Ireland*, vol. II, p. 177.

[2] Cf. Wilson, *The beginnings of modern Ireland*, p. 134 ; Gwynn, *The mediaeval province of Armagh*, pp. 158-60. For details of the provisions see Costello-Coleman, *De annatis Hiberniae*, vol. I (Ulster), pp. 257-8.

How were the clergy trained for their ministry? Was the layman in any way adequately instructed in his religion? What can we deduce from surviving popular religious literature?

Questions come more easily than answers. It is not always easy to know even where to look for the answers. Certainly not in the State Papers, which in this matter present a more than usually one-sided account. We find them recording "blind ignorance, the leader to superstition"[1] even in the most sober verdicts, while with a fanatic like Bishop Bale of Ossory the attack on the existing Church rises to ranting and hysteria.[2]

The late Dr. Robin Flower once printed a very beautiful Irish poem, expressing the poet's devotion to "Ísa mór mac Muire," a poem where, as he says, "we feel the subtle interpenetration of human and divine love which is the most marked feature of the religious lyric of the later middle ages."[3] The poem, the manuscript tells us, was composed by a certain Richard Butler, on the day he died. Dr. Flower is "tempted to associate him" with a Richard Butler who is mentioned in the State Papers in 1537.[4] While he has no real evidence for this identification, lack of precise evidence on this point does not affect the argument substantially. If this is not our Richard Butler, we can feel certain that the State Papers purport to give us a background similar to his.

What is this background?

> The king hath certain lands named the fasaghe of Banauntrey, parcel of the said liberty [of Wexford], let to farm by the king's commissioners . . . . . to Mr. Richard Butler, where inhabiteth Kavenaghes McMorghowe's judges, and Irish rymers, victualling daily such enemies as burn, spoil, and destroy the king's poor subjects the inhabitants of his Grace's county of Wexford; and in the said fasaghe they divide the poor men's goods . . . . . .[5]

Richard Butler, we can feel certain, falls into the State Papers' category of "degenerate English," but there is nothing degenerate in his religious poetry, nor is his background a society whose principal avocation is the receiving of stolen cows.

There is little documented knowledge of this society readily available, Yet we must have such knowledge if we are to control the biased statements of the State Papers. We cannot answer our questions without a much more thorough study of our surviving sources. These sources are in all probability very scanty. For instance, what sermons survive

[1] Cited from State Papers, Ireland, Elizabeth, vol. X, p. 34, in Ronan, *The Reformation in Ireland under Elizabeth*, p. 99.

[2] *The Vocacyon of John Bale to the bishopric of Ossory in Ireland, his persecutions in the same and his final deliverance*, printed in *Harleian Miscellany*, vol. VI, pp. 437-64, is "an autobiographical fragment, which throws a vivid light both upon the opinions of the reforming party in general and upon the writer's unfitness for the task of converting an irritated people." Cf. Wilson, *The beginnings of modern Ireland*, pp. 334 ff., Dudley Edwards, *Church and State in Tudor Ireland*, pp. 147 ff.

[3] Poem, translation and comment in Flower, *The Irish tradition*, pp. 134-5.

[4] *Cal. Carew Manuscripts*, 1515-74, p. 116, cited by Flower, loc. cit.

[5] Ibid. I have extended slightly the quotation as given by Flower.

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from the end of the fifteenth century? Do any? Yet these sermons are very important, for we are in the pre-catechism age. In any case, what may have survived is all the more precious because it is so scanty. So far, it would seem that the study it has received is mainly philological. We should not forget that it is also a historical source of the first importance.

The second question concerns the attitude of the Old-English, especially the towns, under Elizabeth. As far as the Gaelic areas and the Gaelicized Norman lordships are concerned, we can see a fairly satisfactory explanation of their resistance to the new religion at an early stage, for the threat to religion appeared clearly as part of a threat to a whole way of life. The problem was not so simple in the towns, which by long tradition regarded themselves as outposts of Englishry and English civilization. This tradition seems to have died hard. Even in the case of a man like John Lynch of Galway, who in his youth was closely associated with Irish culture and Irish scholars, it is evident that to the end of his days he was not convinced that what Cromwell had done to Catholic Galway and what James I had done to Catholic Ulster were part of the same pattern. The destruction of the former was a barbarous uprooting of an ordered world, the planting of the latter was the leavening of a backward people.[1]

It is true, no doubt, that the towns also were feeling the turn of the screw under Elizabeth. Old cherished liberties were being curtailed, there was a sense of political frustration and defeat. Still, the new impositions, even the cess, can scarcely have been the decisive factor. Perhaps Father Hughes suggests a clue here also. Did the turning-point come in the towns when the issues at stake were put clearly by the Counter-reformation priest?

This is another question awaiting a full and definitive study. The problem is more difficult than the corresponding one in English history, for the Irish effort in founding seminaries had not the same cohesion and unity as Allen's work at Douai. There were many Irish colleges abroad, and some, it would seem, had a very transitory existence. The Irish college at Douai, founded, it may be noted, by a Cusack of Meath, never dominated the scene. But from a very early date in Elizabeth's reign Irish youths were seeking their priestly education abroad, and their influence on their return would seem to have been of the highest importance, "wicked limbs . . . . . detestable enemies of the word of God . . . . . coming out of Louvain . . . . . by whom the proud and undutiful inhabitants of this town [Waterford] are so cankered in Popery that . . . . . Masses infinite they have in their several churches every morning, without fear."[2] Some time later the failure of the reform in the towns is explicitly attributed to these priests:

The inhabitants both in the country and towns incorporate which are of English blood are yet so universally misled by the popish priests, which

[1] See my article, "Two contemporary historians of the confederation of Kilkenny: John Lynch and Richard O'Ferrall," in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. VIII (March 1953), p. 230.

[2] Cited from State Papers, Ireland, Elizabeth, vol. LVIII, p. 2, in Ronan, op. cit., p. 549. The date is 1577.

have of late times from Spain and other foreign parts flocked hither, as that they do not only contemn church government, but also, it may be feared, if timely redress be not had will grow to further disobedience. It is not unknown to your honour that the principal alleged cause of revolt is religion, the troubles in this kingdom being first bred, and since nourished by priests ; nor may it in my poor opinion be hoped but that (if any peace should ensue upon the Lord Deputy's forward endeavours) out of the dead ashes our seditious priests will kindle a new fire if their liberty and practice be not hereafter restrained.[1]

The reformed bishop of Ferns who wrote this letter bore the very Wexford name of Stafford. Before long, this name is to be found rather among the " Romish priests maintained in Wexford,"[2] and one of the Lords Justices is complaining that in his visitation he finds :

that this county, which doth contain the most ancient English plantators, and were lately the most forward professors of the reformed Christian religion in the kingdom, by the pernicious confluence of priests, who have raised among them a Romish hierarchy of bishops, commissaries, vicars-general, and parochial priests of their own, to the great derogation of His Majesty's royal power, and to the establishment of a foreign state and jurisdiction in all matters ecclesiastical, are now in a sort become principally Romish and popish . . . . .[3]

These last considerations would seem to emphasize particularly the need for regional studies in sixteenth-century Ireland. In the present state of our knowledge we understand fairly well what the English reformation was, and the various steps taken by the administration in Dublin to introduce it into Ireland. We know too that it failed—failed mainly because there was no preparation for it, no demand for it, among the people of Ireland, because during the critical years the government was not able to exert sufficient pressure to force its acceptance, and because of the effectiveness of the Counter-reformation. In the understanding of these three issues there is still a great deal of work to be done. It would seem further that this work could best be done in a series of regional studies, for Ireland was in no sense a unit when the Reformation came—indeed unity as later history knew it grew, often painfully, out of resistance to the Reformation. These studies must cover a period of almost two centuries. It will be necessary to begin about the middle of the fifteenth century—say about two generations before the year 1536, when the reform-legislation was first introduced. This should provide sufficient depth and perspective to enable us to see on what kind of a people the Reformation came. It will be

[1] Bishop Nicholas Stafford to the Privy Council of England, 26 July 1602. Printed from State Papers, Ireland, vol.CCXI, p. 277, in Hore, *History of the town and county of Wexford*, vol. VI, p. 256.

[2] See "A note of the Romish priests that are maintained in the English baronies near Wexford," in O'Renehan Manuscripts (Maynooth), vol. XCIX, pp. 41, 51. This is a transcript from T.C.D. MS E. 3. 8, dating from about 1625.

[3] Mr. Justice Cressy to the earl of Strafford. 15 August 1633, printed from Strafford's Letters in Hore, op. cit., vol. V, p. 245.

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necessary to continue to the middle of the seventeenth century, for it is only with the failure of the Catholic Confederation and the Cromwellian disaster that the outcome begins to appear clearly.

I close this note feeling conscious of having asked very many questions and having suggested very few answers. It has been written in the hope that there may be some agreement that some of the questions are the right questions, or at least that they may provoke the right questions. If they do, they will have served their purpose.

PATRICK J. CORISH

The Senses of Scripture

II

The debate on the senses of Scripture which has engaged the attention of Catholic scholars in recent years[1] is not to be regarded as an isolated phenomenon, unconnected with general trends in biblical studies. It seems clear that the exceptional interest shown in this question, particularly in the *sensus plenior* and the spiritual sense of the Old Testament, is to be explained as part of a wider movement which is concerned with providing a defensible *christian* interpretation of the Old Testament, an interpretation which would do justice to the providential links between the two Testaments and also bring out those elements of permanent religious value in the Old Testament which can answer the spiritual requirements of the christian at the present day.

A long tradition, beginning with Christ and the Apostles, has recognised the existence of certain divinely ordained links between the Old Testament and the New ; these links are to be found not only in specific prophetical utterances which have their fulfilment in the messianic age, but also in certain events of the pre-messianic period which are seen as providentially arranged foreshadowings or *types* of the greater realities in the new dispensation inaugurated by Christ. The Old Testament is understood as something preparatory and incomplete, leading on to Christ who is the end of the Law ; he came not to destroy the Law or the prophets but to fulfil.[2] Moreover, the Old Testament could be freely appealed to for teaching and examples with a practical bearing on christian life ; " for whatsoever was written beforehand, was written for our instruction, that through patience and the consolation of the Scriptures we might have hope."[3]

There were differences of view, or at least of emphasis, as to the mode and extent of the correspondences between the Testaments and, in

[1] Cf. *I. Theol. Quarterly*, xxi (1954), pp. 181ff.
[2] Mt. 5 : 17 ; Rom. 10 : 4 ; Gal. 3 : 24f ; 1 Pet. 1 : 10-12.
[3] Rom. 15 : 4 ; 2 Tim. 3 : 14-17.